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ABSTRACT

Prepared to introduce adult education program planners to the basic concepts integral to and alternative strategies for conducting needs assessments, this instructional handbook consists of a series of six chapters or instructional booklets (also available separately--see note.) Topics covered in each chapter are as follows: introduction to needs assessment (stimulus for, definitions for, purpose of, target audience for, content of, use of, and benefits of instructional handbooks); determining what information to collect (determining scope, goals, and measures); determining where information can be found (determining target population, authorities, and recorded material); determining how to gather information (determining strategies for retrieving target populations, authorities, and recorded materials); determining how to summarize information (filtering, combining, and organizing need information); determining how to interpret information (determining forces impacting needs, sources of force information, strategies for gathering force information, and methods for summarizing force information). Covered next is the conclusion of the needs assessment project. (MN)

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Addressing Needs By Assessing Needs: **A Handbook for Adult Education Program Planners**

Final Report

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**Special Community Service
and Continuing
Education Project**

**College of Education
Texas A&M University**

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ADDRESSING NEEDS BY ASSESSING NEEDS:
A HANDBOOK FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM PLANNERS

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PREFACE

This instructional handbook has been prepared by the Special Community Service and Continuing Education staff at Texas A&M University. Its purpose is to introduce a diverse body of adult education program planners to basic concepts integral to, and alternative strategies appropriate for, conducting needs assessments. A broad base of research and information relevant to practice has been tapped in the development of the handbook.

This handbook is not in its final form but is rather "in development" as prepared for small group testing in conjunction with a collection of adult education practitioners. Refinements have been made following a one-on-one testing program. Further refinements will be made subsequent to small groups field testing.

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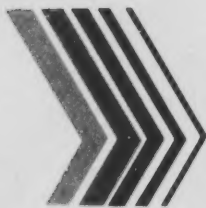
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AN INTRODUCTION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**Determining What
Information To Collect**

**Determining Where
Information Can Be Found**

**Determining How To
Gather Information**

**Determining How To
Summarize Information**

**Determining How To
Interpret Information**

A CONCLUSION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Stimulus for Instructional Handbook

The field of adult education has come, over time, to flourish in what many think of as most unlikely places. Yet, throughout this diverse evolution of the field, the assessment of need has held a long and honored position as an integral part of the program planning process and as a critical responsibility for every programmer. It has been one of the field's most pervasive and enduring philosophic postures.

It has been recognized generally that program planners, regardless of the settings within which they function, are engaged in two major and interrelated activities of the planning process: (1) diagnosing or assessing--needs assessment; and (2) remediating or developing--program development. Further, it has been held that program development derives its justification from the prior assessment of needs. This position places the program planner in a pivotal social role: of discovering needs; of building programs; and of effecting sweeping changes within individuals, institutions, and communities.

At present, the needs assessment literature base, both

within and outside the field, is not judged adequate to guide the adult education practitioner in conducting a needs assessment for two fundamental reasons. First, those commonly known and available resources within the field are limited both in number and utility. Practical guidelines for engagement in the needs assessment undertaking have not been adequately specified. Thus, a specific process model or strategy is not readily available to provide direction in determining what information to collect, where the information is to be found, how the information is to be gathered, how the information is to be summarized, and how the information is to be interpreted. Without such guidance, a valid and reliable basis for programming cannot be assured. Second, a number of sources outside the field exist which address the needs assessment process. Such sources, typically incorporate a level of specificity which do provide adequate guidance for a practitioner in conducting a needs assessment. However, they are institution- or context-specific; and therefore, they are built upon some assumptions which are inappropriate given the diversified contexts, focuses, and institutional settings within which adult education programming takes place. As a consequence, though they offer concrete and specific guidelines for conducting a needs assessment from a particular institutional perspective, they are inadequate because their guidelines are not transferable to adult settings. Given the centrality of needs assessment and its significance to the entire program planning

process and ultimately to the quality of life of adults within our nation, a serious responsibility exists within the field to address this void.

Consequently, in response to this challenge, the principal author of this handbook has applied herself over a several year period, both on a part-time and on a full-time basis, to the resolution of this critical problem of the field. The outcome of these research efforts was the development of a needs assessment process model for use by adult education planners and applicable in whatever institutional settings planners find themselves. The next step in the resolution of this need or void within the field was to transform this general process model from its stylized and technical research mode into a set of hands-on training materials. These activities are currently in progress. They are being funded by a grant from the Special Community Service and Continuing Education Program of the U.S. Department of Education. Through this grant, our project is commissioned to begin the preliminary development of these materials and the preliminary testing of them with diverse adult education programming professionals in Texas. The long-range goal is to progressively refine these materials to the level where they merit national dissemination.

Definitions for Instructional Handbook

It is important to discuss the central concepts which form the foundation for the entire instructional handbook; namely, need and needs assessment. We will first discuss the

term need, how it is commonly used, and the restricted sense in which we will be using it. Then, we will discuss the term needs assessment, our definition of needs assessment, and the specific limitations which such a definition automatically carries with it.

Need is a tricky term because it is used in so many different ways. People use it to describe present problems with which they are faced: "The young people in our community have a major need; their unemployment rate is at 37%." People also use the term to describe a goal that they are trying to achieve: "We need equal opportunity employment in our community." To further complicate the situation, people speak of needs as organized actions to attain an end: "Our community needs low-cost day care centers to make it possible for young mothers to enter the job market."

If we are to proceed together in any discussion of the needs assessment process, it is imperative that we share a common perception of how the term need is being used. As we define the term, and as many planners are currently defining the term, need is not a problem, not a present degraded situation; need is not an end, not a future goal to be achieved; need is not a means, not a planned program to attain an end. Need is a discrepancy between where people are and where they want to be or where someone else thinks they are and where they ought to be. Need is the gap between a present condition and a desired future condition. Further, the issue of who

says there is a need is a critical one and is fully addressed in one of the chapters.

If this definition of need is applied to an assessment process, then it follows that the needs assessment process is essentially a system for identifying both the present situation and the level of aspiration of select groups of people. Further, if, with this information, discrepancies are found to exist, needs have been identified. Simply expressed, needs assessment is a tool for decision makers. It is a systematic process that provides the right information at the right time to the right decision maker.

Decision makers like yourselves have other tools at their disposal for enhancing the quality of their decision-making. Two of these tools are especially important, namely, the creative intuition and the practical experience of the decision maker. There is no substitute, including needs assessment, for what intuition and experience bring to the decision-making process. What needs assessment can do is complement these resources. It cannot take their places.

The information system we will be talking about is a special kind of information system. It is a system developed to help us learn more about people and about their needs in order that we--as providers of services for people--can make an appropriate response and can help reduce or eliminate the needs that are found to exist. Needs assessment is not the process of responding to needs, but rather, is the process of

identifying and analyzing needs in such a way that we can decide if any response or what type of response is appropriate on our part. Thus, needs assessment is the prelude to, and the foundation for, the program development or building process.

A caution is in order. This handbook, which describes the needs assessment process, does not lead one into an "educational" needs assessment such as is frequently undertaken by education practitioners in our traditionally youth oriented institutions. They would be looking at needs such as the reading level or the knowledge of history of their student body. This handbook represents, on the contrary, a needs assessment not limited to assessing purely educational needs or discrepancies, but rather one which is focused on the very broad domains of human enterprise, such as the quality of interpersonal relationships or the quality of civic responsibility within the community. One could say that we are looking at "human" needs rather than "educational" needs. This position is based on the premise that many problem situations exist which do not, on the exterior, have the "trappings" of an educational problem, but which do have a dimension that can be appropriately addressed, at least in part, by educational programs or services. Conversely, those problems which do have the "trappings" of educational need states may likewise be met, and at times, in a more substantive manner by programs or services that are not strictly

educational.

One other caution is important in our discussion. There are two distinct levels within which an assessment of needs is appropriate. First, there is the instructional level in which a specific educational diagnosis is made of persons engaged in or about to engage in an educational program. Needs assessment at this level is primarily a tool for, and a responsibility of, the instructor. It is employed to identify educational needs, and it serves as a basis for determining what is to transpire in the teaching-learning environment. Second, there is the programming level in which a general diagnosis is made of select groups of persons. Needs assessment at this level is primarily a tool for, and a responsibility of, the program developer or administrator. It is employed to identify a potentially broad array of human needs, and it serves as a basis for determining whether or not an educational program ought to be designed as a partial or complete response to that need. It is the second level of needs assessment that is of interest to us in this instructional handbook, namely, needs assessment for program planners.

Purpose of Instructional Handbook

Two fundamental purposes are seen for these instructional chapters. First, one purpose is to assist professionals engaged in building educational programs for adults, in conducting quality needs assessments. Obviously, needs are out

there, and it is essential that persons in positions of leadership and responsibility have the capability of extracting these needs from the real world in a valid, reliable, and useful manner. By doing so, programmatic decision-making will be informed not only by intuition and experience but also by information that can be trusted. Second, another equally important purpose is envisioned for these instructional booklets; namely, to assist program developers in becoming comfortable with the idea of needs assessment. Needs assessment has become a buzz word of the seventies. As such, a mystique has begun to surround the entire process which tends to place all who approach it in a posture of paralyzed awe rather than in a posture of dynamic interaction. We want you to reach that level of comfort which will permit you to call upon the needs assessment process in a flexible manner at those times when you judge it can best serve your purposes.

Needs assessments that will result from the application of the concepts and processes put forward in these chapters will be as varied in form and substance as the field itself. This is both true and commendable. It is our hope that these materials are so designed as to permit--no, insure--that variability. Indeed, a needs assessment is, in some respects, much like tailor-made clothing. It will be good only if it fits the wearer, and in the needs assessment enterprises of adult education, "one size does not fit all." You can make

your needs assessment comprehensive or focused, formal or informal, lengthy or abbreviated, costly or inexpensive. There are all sizes, shapes, and descriptions, for there is no correct needs assessment. The correct one is one that builds for you a valid reliable information base from which program development can proceed. It is only good or correct if it does what you want it to do!

Target Audience for Instructional Handbook

This instructional handbook is intended for use by people engaged in program planning for adults in such diverse settings as: cooperative extension services; colleges and universities; museums; hospitals; labor unions; religious institutions; public elementary and secondary schools; business and industry; correctional institutions; proprietary and trade institutions; community colleges; libraries; professional associations; military; and community service, health and welfare associations.

It is for professionals who assume quite dissimilar sounding roles within these institutions such as: Corporation Training Consultant; Base Training Officer; Dean of Public Service, Adult and Continuing Education; Director of Community Service; County Extension Agent; Staff Development Specialist for Adult Resource Centers; Director of Adult Services; Coordinator of Patient Education; Coordinator of Apprenticeship and Training; Union Research and Education Director; Director of Office of Adult Education; and

Coordinator of Religious Education. These individuals and these institutions are united by their focus: programming for adult learners.

Content of Instructional Handbook

There are five instructional chapters in this handbook which will address the central concepts and strategies for the needs assessment process. In addition to the present introductory chapter and a concluding chapter, these five chapters each contain an introduction consisting of a slice-of-life analogy of the question raised within the chapter and a highlighting of the purpose of the chapter. The body of the chapters contains a discussion and definition of the central concepts, with accompanying examples, and a review of the major processes to be undertaken in the resolution of the question addressed, also with illustrative examples. A summary section highlights the central points of instruction and helps establish a linkage with the following chapter.

The five chapters of the needs assessment process are:

- "Determining What Information to Collect"
- "Determining Where Information Can be Found"
- "Determining How Information Can be Gathered"
- "Determining How to Summarize Information"
- "Determining How to Interpret Information"

Use of Instructional Handbook

These instructional chapters will be presented to you in a logical sequence as a planning tool to assist you in making

those decisions central to the needs assessment undertaking. It is anticipated that, fortified by these resources, you will be able to take these ideas and implement them in a time sequence which may or may not parallel the logical sequence of the five chapters.

A chapter format was selected to provide you with the latitude to enter, exit, and skip at any point you desire. This was done because we have assumed that there may be times when it is advisable and feasible to enter and exit the needs assessment process at various stages. For example, perhaps you have access to an array of data that has just been collected by a colleague in your department and you have been asked to "see what you can make of it." You could go directly to the chapter which deals with organizing the data, without consulting the previous chapters. Or perhaps you have already identified the kind of information you want and you know you are committed to a phone survey as the method of gathering data; however, you have yet to determine the best sources for your information. In this event, you should go to chapter number three, "Determining Where Information Can be Found," and then directly to chapter number six, "Determining How to Interpret Information." On the other hand, and perhaps more frequently, there will be occasions in which you will be starting at the very beginning and progressing through the end of the needs assessment process. We recommend that even though you think you can skip

certain steps as you proceed to implement the process, you should consider this carefully. It would be better for you to study the chapter in question before you dismiss the operation completely. If after checking the chapter you feel that you can bypass it because of certain givens in your situations, you have at least avoided some potentially critical gaps in your process.

Two supplemental aids have been developed to assist you in synthesizing and applying the central ideas contained within this handbook. These include, first of all, a pull-out synopsis of the basic concepts and principles and strategies of the needs assessment process, and secondly, integrated case studies applicable to each of the major adult education institutional settings.

Benefits of Instructional Handbooks

A number of benefits are expected to result from the implementation of this project. First, training materials will have been developed with a high level of validity, reliability, and utility for a diverse body of practitioners of adult education within our nation. Whereas many training materials are developed from the exclusive perspective of practice in the field, these training materials will have been developed as a result of the interaction of both theory and practice. A rich theoretical base provides the underpinnings for the model. Extensive practitioner interaction with the training materials derived from the needs assessment

model provides the enrichment and the reality testing for the training materials. Second, a void in the professional development of adult education program planning practitioners will have been filled. The most readily accessible form which professional development could take is not through the development of graduate level programs of training or even through an elaborate program of in-service training workshops, but rather, through the relatively inexpensive medium of the printed word. These training materials will thus have the potential for impacting broad segments of practitioner groups which might otherwise have been unaffected by developments in the area of needs assessment. Third, the active involvement of practitioners on both the grass roots level--policy implementers--and on the highest levels of institutional leadership--policy makers--would provide the ideal mix for the innovations in practice proposed within the needs assessment training materials to be fully adopted. This broad adoption within the field will constitute a major contribution of the professionalization of practice.

Thus, this project is expected to result in the preparation of valid, reliable, and useful professional development training materials which will be readily accessible to all adult education program planning practitioners and which will have a high probability of being broadly adopted by the field. The ultimate benefit will be the contribution

of the project to the improvement of the quality of life for individuals, institutions, and communities.

Summary

This handbook is designed to fill a void in the needs assessment literature available to the adult education program planner. The needs assessment literature specifically written for assessors has been deficient in two respects: first, little or no direction on information identification, location, collection, organizing, and interpretation and; second, few allowances for the diversity of contexts and institutional settings in which assessors find themselves.

We will provide you with the planning tools for effectively conducting a needs assessment. We cannot give you answers for your needs assessment, but we can help you find the answers which are best for you. These materials are not an end in themselves--they are a means to an end. Each basic decision should be faced before you jump ahead and find yourself overwhelmed by the needs assessment process. Needs assessments are not simple, but they can be if certain definitive steps are taken. To be effective and provide you with a valid and reliable programming base, care must be taken at each step in the process. Good luck as you begin.

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT



**Determining What
Information To Collect**

**Determining Where
Information Can Be Found**

**Determining How To
Gather Information**

**Determining How To
Summarize Information**

**Determining How To
Interpret Information**

A CONCLUSION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

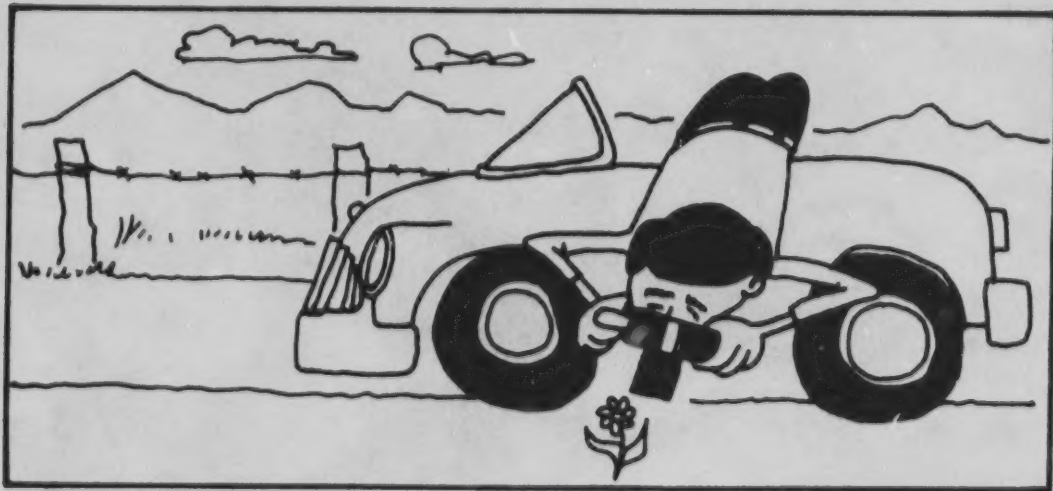
CHAPTER II

DETERMINING WHAT INFORMATION TO COLLECT

Introduction

Analogy

This booklet is not unlike taking pictures. It should appeal to the amateur and the not-so-amateur photographer in all of us. Can you see yourself riding along a great Texas highway and being caught by a beautiful display of wildflowers? You stop the car, and because you are struck with the scene, you reach for your handy camera. What do you do first? Typically, you will try to catch just the picture that will have the most meaning for you. Do you want the cloud-filled sky, the mesquite, and brahmans included in the picture? Or, do you want a scene of the weather-worn restraining fence and windmill facing toward the sunset?



After you decide on which vista is the most appropriate, you will want to focus in and make sure you include all of the elements that made your initial decision so appealing to you. You will want to include all of those features which make the wildflower scene a quality scene for you. Then, the instant click and forever--or almost forever--you have caught it. It

is important that those elements which are most precious to you are clear and discernable once the process of developing the colored film has been completed. Aha! you have done it! You can see the various hues of color in the sky; the differences in the moods of the overhanging clouds; the patch of hundreds of bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes, which form a perfect backdrop for a soft and perfect intermingling of a single paintbrush and bluebonnet, so perfect that you can almost smell them. You are even sure that you can smell the brahmans and hear them contentedly chewing.

You have moved from scope, through focus, to measurement in a process that is replicated each day a million times over by each one of us. It is this same process that we are anxious to help you recreate during your needs assessment activities as the basis for your educational programming. We want to help you capture something meaningful by carefully identifying the scope for your study, getting a good focus, and then capturing it in great detail, replicated for future reference.

Purpose

Many folks just like you are faced with the prospect and responsibility of building educational programs for adults. You may be in the process of exploring new missions for your institutions, determining future programming options, prioritizing existing missions, analyzing your adequacy in meeting existing missions, identifying new or inadequately served client groups, or diagnosing problems in program implementation. These undertakings are often highly intuitive and creative processes, which at times defy analysis.

To complement these processes, we propose that you begin the program planning process with a needs assessment designed to help you deal systematically with the critical questions and decisions which ought to be addressed before any program development begins.

It is the purpose of this booklet to help you determine

the scope, focus, and measures of your needs assessment undertaking: to help you determine what information you want to collect in your study. The possibilities are indeed limitless for amassing endless universes of information in the needs assessment process. Yet, surely one of the most critical and delicate challenges facing the decision maker is avoiding an overabundance of irrelevant information. The best safeguard against such an unfortunate development is to build a system that reflects who you are and where you want to go: a system which feeds that type of information, and only that type of information, to you which can effectively help you get from here to there.

We will first assist you in this process of determining your needs assessment scope through an analysis of your mission and your immediate and long-range concerns. Next, we will assist you in identifying appropriate goals for assessment in your undertaking. Finally, we will help you specify comprehensive and sensitive measures for the goals which you have selected. These three processes, each in their way, should help you determine what information to collect in your needs assessment. This is the starting point of every needs assessment undertaking and establishes the ground for your subsequent determination of where you are going to gather the very best information.

Determining ScopeConcept

To help you determine an appropriate scope for your study, you will want to reflect upon those broad areas of human striving which comprise, in the aggregate, the missions toward which educational programs for adults are directed. Some groups, such as the League of Women Voters, according to their mission, work very diligently to improve the civic competence and commitment of the men and women in our society. Others, like community recreation departments, again in keeping with their mission, work very diligently to build skills and enjoyment in a broad area of recreational pursuits as well as commitment to strengthen social interaction within the community. Training within the fire and police departments is directed primarily toward upgrading and updating the technical skills of all employees and also toward insuring the safety of the entire community.

Almost all groups and agencies who work with adults identify with one or several of these broad classes of human striving as their part in improving the quality of life for that bit of the world for which they have some responsibility. Some agencies may focus on areas like the spiritual enrichment, the emotional development, or the personal interrelationships of adults. Others may have a major concern for the adults' general educational competence or

vocational updating. There are also agencies concentrating on the promotion of physical well-being or meaningful leisure activities. Education contributes in many ways to the development of adults and thus to the society in which they live.

Thus, scope is defined as those facets of human development which are to be studied in the needs assessment.

Process

To specify the scope for your needs assessment, we suggest that you give consideration to the following five steps:

First, you are advised to identify your mission. What broad educational programs or services are you mandated to provide for persons? The mission is a typically broad statement which shows the rationale for the existence of an entity, what it is broadly intended to achieve for people. It usually includes its role and its range of operations; it may further include its programs. In most cases the mission is cited in a very formal, written statement in the philosophy or policy section of one of your institution's publications. For that reason, your mission should be readily available. The mission identified provides you with a legitimacy in your educational undertakings and specifies an appropriate sphere for your activities. For example, EARN is a city-wide program, funded by a local community college district, the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, and the Bureau of the Handicapped of H.E.W. Its purpose is to provide the means whereby moderately physically handicapped

adults are given the opportunity to improve their pre-job competencies in order to become job ready.

Second, identify a list of immediate concerns. The list may be almost endless or very brief. It should be a unique reflection of you and your concerns. Are you, as a training director in business and industry facing the task of establishing priorities for your major program areas? Are you concerned with an unwillingness of your secretarial staff to participate in programs designed for them? Do your personnel prefer to engage in training programs offered by the community college rather than the ones that you are offering? Did your central office just recently mandate that all training directors conduct a needs assessment of preretirement employees because of the available federal pilot funding for demonstration programs with this particular group? Detailing out all of these immediate concerns should give you a better picture of a number of the necessary tasks you have to handle in the near future and may help to highlight the most appropriate scope for your needs assessment.

Third, identify a list of long-range concerns. As director of library services for adults, what are some issues that you might be facing within five to ten years time or some definite trends of institutional development for which you should start preparing? Are you being pressed by a changing pattern of information storage and dissemination to move to new forms of storing and communicating

information? What elements of the communications revolution do you need to explore? How will you fulfill your role of improving the functional literacy of the entire adult population in your service area? Are you anticipating changes in your institution's structure or division's functioning? Are you preparing to move heavily into a major volunteer staffing component adult services program? Development of a list of long-range concerns will help provide you with a better sense of the direction for your needs assessment undertaking.

Fourth, you should analyze your mission statement, your immediate, and your long-range concerns by judging what information would be most relevant and appropriate for this needs assessment undertaking.

Finally, you should decide the scope of this needs study. It is only you who can decide what information you should gather in your needs assessment undertaking. Select those major facets of human striving that are of particular concern to you for the time being.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to determine a needs assessment scope which is relevant and appropriate given its institutional mission, its immediate, and its long-range concerns.

Determining Goals

Concept

In this section, we are going to introduce you to the concept of goal and, in the process, help you to identify what would probably constitute important and unrealized goals for study in your needs assessment.

Goal is defined as a desired end state which both contributes to the definition and the realization of the scope of your needs assessment. In other words, goals are statements describing a broad intent, state, or condition of the areas to be addressed in the needs study. Goals are refinements of the scope. Further, just as needs assessments should flow from and be tailored to the unique institutions or educational entities undertaking them, so should the goals flow from and be tailored to the scope addressed in the needs study. For example, if, as the community college, community service division, we are going to study vocational needs of high school dropouts, one possible goal would be "to improve the prevocational skills" of this target group. Or, if I am involved in vocational and social development as the Local Garment Workers' Union director, appropriate goals might include: increasing participation in union activities or improvement in skills of representing colleagues to management.

A goal is seen as a positive and worthy attainment. Even though words with negative implications such as "reduce" or "eliminate" and "heart attacks" or "unemployment" may be

used, the ultimate intent of the goal remains steadfast, namely, to effect positive change. Thus, some examples of health-related goals may be to decrease incidence of teenage pregnancy, to reduce the incidence of employee accidents in the work setting, to increase the level of physical activity of residents in a retirement community, to increase the level of early detection of glaucoma, or to reduce the incidence of alcoholism among women in the home setting. These still constitute goals since they contribute both to the definition and realization of your needs assessment scope: physical well-being of the community.

Process

We are going to propose a three-step procedure to help you to develop relevant goals:

In the initial step we suggest that you develop an extensive listing of goals which contribute either to the definition or realization of the scope of the needs assessment. They should contribute to or facilitate the full attainment of an identified scope. Further, we suggest that you refine the goals list by eliminating or restating those goals which overlap. You may also want to consider eliminating or restructuring goals that cannot be measured. For example, as the County Mental Health Association Board of Directors, some goals you identify under the category of emotional needs of divorced women may be to improve self-concept, to enlarge the friendship circle, to adjust to a new life role,

to develop new interests or hobbies, to reduce dissatisfaction in the present life role, or to reduce uncertainty of the future life roles. You may find that the goal of adjusting to a new life role covers what the last two goals indicate. You may also find the "self-concept" in the first goal is difficult to measure. Thus, you might want to rephrase the goal thus: "to think positively of oneself." When you complete this step, you will have produced a listing of discrete and measurable goals.

Secondly, analyze the goals in terms of their importance in contributing to the realization or lack of realization of your needs assessment scope. In the above example, the first and third goals would probably have a high priority in terms of the emotional needs of divorced women. Further analyze the goals in terms of whether or not they have already been attained or realized.

Third, decide on the goals which you will study for your needs assessment. Eliminate those goals, if there are any, that are of minor importance to the realization of your scope. Further, you should eliminate those goals that you judge have been adequately realized already.

To conclude, the Principle for Practice is to identify goals which are both important and unrealized.

Determining Measures

Concept

As mentioned previously, in a needs assessment, there is no point in dealing with goals that cannot be measured. That means that a goal should allow for specific translation in terms of performance, and the needs assessor must be able to determine whether or not some desired outcome has been accomplished. Thus, it is the purpose of this section to assist you in developing comprehensive and sensitive measures for the goals which you have judged to be both important and unrealized.

Supposing you feel ill and you visit your doctor to find out why you feel poorly. How can your doctor tell whether you are healthy or not? He looks for symptoms; he also looks at a great number of specific measures like blood pressure, pulse, weight, visual acuity, gait, temperature, triglycerides, and cholesterol count to name but a few which serve as indicators of health status. In other words, he uses specific physiological measures as a reference, and he checks these measures against certain standards or criteria for normalcy in making judgments about your health. The same thing happens to our definition of goals. We need to identify specific measures which would help us to know whether or not goals have been attained.

Thus, measure is defined as an operational statement or indicator for either one dimension of a goal or a complete goal. It is a yardstick that helps you to detect or recognize whether, and in what dimension, a goal identified

for your needs assessment has been attained. Some possible measures for the goal "improving the cardiovascular fitness of the population in the community" would be: first, the number of hours an individual spends on outdoor activities per week; second, the number of days per week a household eats a balanced meal comprising the four basic food groups; or third, the number of hours an individual spends sleeping per day.

Process

Now, we are going to propose these activities which would yield comprehensive and sensitive measures for your needs assessment:

First, identify as many specific measures for each of the goals as possible. The more specifics you can come up with, the more you will be able to tell whether or not your goal statement is being measured adequately.

Secondly, analyze these measures in terms of their contribution to comprehensive and sensitive measurement of each of your goals. For example, if, as the Community Education Director for a suburban independent school district, one goal of your needs assessment is to improve the English language proficiency of Vietnamese immigrants, some possible measures for it might be: the recognition of one hundred of the most common English words, the recognition of common traffic signs, the ability to express basic requests

and responses in English, the ability to speak English with correct intonation and accent, the ability to understand English when spoken at a normal rate, and lastly, the ability to comprehend what is spoken. Now, ask yourself if you have explored a comprehensive list of measures for English proficiency. You have dealt with some English proficiency skills concerning basic vocabulary, speaking, and listening. What about the dimension relating to skills of reading, like the ability to read at an eighth grade level or the ability of the student to comprehend what has been read and to interpret the material in his own words? What about the dimension of writing, like the ability to summarize what has been read with correct grammar and sentence structure? What about the dimension of life coping skills, like the ability to apply correctly for employment or to locate suitable housing for the family or schooling for the children? You see, it is important that you spend some time to review the list of measures to make sure it is comprehensive and that you have not left out any significant dimensions of the goal to be measured. You will want also to analyze those measures in terms of how sensitive they are in identifying differences reflected by lapses of time or differences within the population to be studied. If, as the president of a local League of Women Voters chapter, you use voting participation in presidential elections as a measure of the

goal of improving the political activism of American citizens, it is a measure that occurs only every four years and, thus, is not sensitive enough to measure the political activism of American citizens on a day to day basis; it is not sensitive to changes that are occurring over time. Further, if as a Co-Op director you use the possession of a high school diploma as a measure for the goal to improve the pre-vocational skills of young adults, ages sixteen through twenty-five, it is obvious that this is not a sensitive measure for those in the age group sixteen through eighteen, or it may not help you identify minority youth who have pre-vocational skills but are still unemployed.

Finally, decide on those measures that you will use in your needs assessment to study your identified goals.

Thus, the principle for practice is to develop measures which insure both comprehensive and sensitive measurement of identified goals.

Summary

In determining what information you should collect in your needs assessment undertaking, you should first determine the scope for your study. Next, you should develop goals appropriate to this scope; lastly, you should identify good measures for your goals.

Scope is a statement setting substantive limits to your study and identifying those areas of human striving upon

which your inquiry will focus. You should be able to identify your scope in terms of relevance and appropriateness to your mission and to your immediate and long-range concerns.

Goal refers to a desired end state which contributes to the definition and realization of the scope of your needs assessment. The goals which you judge to be both important and unrealized should be pursued for study.

Measure is an operational statement for either one dimension of a goal or a complete goal. It is used to quantify a goal. Your development of comprehensive and sensitive measures will help you to detect whether, and to what degree, the goals identified for your needs assessment have been attained.

After deciding what information to collect for your needs assessment, are you anxious to know who to approach and where to go to gather your needs information? We will orient you to that in the chapter that follows, Determining Where Information Can Be Found.

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**Determining What
Information To Collect**



**Determining Where
Information Can Be Found**

**Determining How To
Gather Information**

**Determining How To
Summarize Information**

**Determining How To
Interpret Information**

A CONCLUSION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER III

DETERMINING WHERE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND

Introduction

Analogy

Surely, most of us have gone fishing at some point in our lives. Perhaps many of us go fishing a good bit of the time. If you have any feel for the great sport, you should be right at home with this instructional booklet. You will not be left "at bay".

The first item on your agenda is to determine what kind of delectable or trophy, as the case may be, you want to catch. What is it that you are after anyway? This is just the question that the previous instructional booklet set out to have you think about. You have always had a fascination with oysters, let us say, especially the ones with the little pearls in them. You have always been secretly dreaming about having that kind of luck in retrieving what you were after.



You have several alternatives open before you in your quest for oysters. The be all and the end all is to catch the little buggers. You may decide to journey down to the

gulf and at the docks, begin to ask the commercial fishermen just where they found the biggest catches that day, or you may decide to check with the state Fish and Game Department Information Officer and set out, based on the information he could provide. Yet again, you may rely on the merchants whose stock and trade is running deep sea fishing jaunts for a hopeful public; you may decide to study the maritime charts available in the Corpus Museum of the Texas Gulf; or you may decide that you are an honest, sincere, upright, and reasonably intelligent fisherman, and you may rely solely on your own resources to help you to get to what you are searching for--the oyster--preferably with a pearl. You may even have to deal with finding discrepant information as you tap into the vast and diverse store of information. And, of course, you will have to deal with this diversity before you actually set out on your great fishing expedition, but this is an issue to be dealt with at a later point. Now you want to tap into those sources which can give you the best information.

There, the analogy stops, for in the world of human affairs, you not only could rely on yourself, the word of select experts, an array of already available information tucked away in neat little crannies, but you also could ask the "oysters" the question of where they are. This booklet will lead you to identify the most appropriate sources of information.

Purpose

As stated briefly in An Introduction to Needs Assessment, this chapter is designed to help you explore the major alternative sources of information for your needs assessment and to provide you with some techniques for locating such sources efficiently.

Suppose you are in the process of identifying the needs of your client group, whom would you approach and where would you go to elicit good information? Quite probably, you might go to your supervisor or someone you have identified as having special knowledge or experience; you might want to talk to a number of your clients; or you might simply review

an array of records or reports which you judge relevant to your inquiry. Multiple sources of information do exist, and each of them would provide us with a different perspective of the reality. In undertaking a needs assessment, it is important that we tap into multiple and appropriate sources for information not only to insure a comprehensive grasp of human needs, but also to counter-balance any individual bias of the information providers. So you see, you are on the right track; but in order to simplify the situation, we group these various sources of information into two major types. The first type is being referred to as the key informant source which includes both authorities and target population; the second type is being referred to as recorded material which includes printed as well as audio or visual information. These three concepts, authorities, target population, and recorded material, will be defined and the process for their identification will be described.

The previous chapter has helped you answer questions about what information to collect, moving from the determination of scope through goals to measures, to form the basis for the rest of your needs assessment undertaking. This chapter assists you in determining where you can best obtain this information. Then, the following chapter will help you select from among many approaches, the best for you in effectively collecting the needs information.

Determining Target Population

In the following section, we will introduce you to the concept of target population. We will also provide you with five basic steps for identifying the target population for your study.

Concept

Target population is defined as that group of persons identified as the focus for study in the needs assessment undertaking. This group, in fact, can be described as the potential owners of need. The group constitutes clientele or potential clientele for your future programming activities. In contrast to a focus on authorities who would assert or prescribe needs for others, the target population can speak in its own behalf. They, from their own perceptions, can describe their present status and their levels of aspiration. For example, as a county extension agent concerned with nutrition of the families within your county, it is possible that any one of the following or several of the following groups would be identified as your target population: women in the low rent housing complexes in the cities, women in the rural areas of the county, elderly members of the county who are relying on their own resources to procure and prepare daily meals, families on food stamps, single working men and women in the community, pregnant women or women with infants, and the handicapped. Any one of these groups or several groups in consort could be realistic target

populations given your role and responsibility within the extension service.

Process

Now we are going to recommend basic steps in determining your target population for the needs assessment undertaking:

First, develop a list of groups that are relevant to your institution. In other words, you need to identify those you are mandated to serve, by reason of your mission. For instance, if you are a regional training director in the Southwestern Life Insurance Association, the population which is relevant to you would most likely be the full range of bank clerks in the various departments of the bank, the first line supervisory personnel for each of these departments, as well as department officers for each of the six banks and their branches within your region. Quite a different population would be relevant to you were your role one within the personnel office as director of public relations and public information for the insurance association. Identifying your relevant population most often will involve you in specifying your clientele and your service area.

Second, identify those populations or groups about which you have some current concerns. They may be groups receiving emphasis or priority attention of your institution. For example, the Continuing Education Division of Monticello University aims to provide continuing education programs for all high school graduates age sixteen or over in the greater

Dallas-Fort Worth area, which is their population of relevance. However, they have been making a major investment in programs for mid-management and upwardly mobile women from business and industry in the greater metroplex who then become a priority clientele or current concerns group. It is also advisable to identify any group or groups who are not currently being served. Thus to refer back to the county extension agent, it is quite possible that her relevant population is all teens and young and not-so-young adults in the county who are responsible for their own and/or others' nutrition. Perhaps, at present, rural women with young families are being served almost exclusively and the single working man or woman living alone or the urban heads of household on welfare have not been served at all. Seeing clearly your clientele and service area, your priority groups and those not being served helps highlight the choices which you have before you in terms of identifying a target population for your needs assessment undertaking.

Third, identify any groups which tend to emerge in an exploration of your long-range concerns. As the library director for adult services in rural Manilla County, you may be especially concerned about the long-range personal, family, and community impact of the non-English speaking, unemployed minority wives and mothers. You may also be concerned, as the county appears to be losing its vibrant agricultural base, on how to help those small farm families who will

remain to supplement their family incomes through home-bound craft and "industry."

Fourth, your next task is to analyze what you have identified in the previous activities in terms of the appropriateness and relevance of these groups as a focus for your present study.

The fifth step is to decide on your target population. At this point, your basic intuition and hard won experience come to the fore and assist you in making the value judgment. There may be instances in which it is advisable to include as a focus for your study all of your clientele in your service area. You may want to study the nutritional needs of all of those whom you have been charged to serve. On the other hand, you may decide that a strategy of "divide and conquer" is what is called for and so you are going to study at this time only those groups who have been neglected through no fault of their own but rather only because of your lack of time and resources to respond to them. Or perhaps, those groups whom you have been serving with the "good old stand-by programs" seem to be growing weary of the same old basic food groups routine. There may even be instances in which you are in the throes of developing an entirely new dimension within your mission and therefore you choose to study as a target group some collection of persons previously not part of your relevant population at all. It is important to select as a target population that group or

those groups whom you judge as ripe for study at this time.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to identify the target population for the study.

Determining Authorities

In this section, we are going to introduce to you the concept of authority and the most effective process for locating representative authorities.

Concept

Authority is defined as an individual with superior knowledge and/or extensive experience in a given area of human activity. Authorities may be public officials; leaders of local pressure groups; professionals; administrative or program personnel in community agencies, business and industry, civic agencies, welfare groups, and religious institutions. More specifically, if, as the chairman of the county ministerial association, you are going to study the emotional development of your target population in the needs assessment, some authorities whom you might approach for information would likely be fellow ministers, directors of women's centers, directors of mental health centers, or certain health-related professionals such as psychiatrists or psychologists. Authorities can be found within both the formal public and private institutions as well as the voluntary associations of the community. These two types of entities, the formal and informal collectivities, are structurally and functionally unique and differ markedly in their ability to respond and in

the mode of their response to new and unmet needs. Thus, they fulfill ideally complementary functions within the community. At times, authorities may be independent individuals who are knowledgeable about the needs with respect to a particular goal or for a particular clientele of interest in your needs assessment. Thus, they are also good sources to tap for need information.

Process

Now, we are going to recommend four basic steps for efficiently locating representative authorities as sources of information in your needs assessment:

First, you want to develop a list of institutions and associations relevant to your needs assessment inquiry, namely, those that are providing goods or services related to the goals identified for study in your needs assessment. Identify within those institutions those professionals who are most likely to be able to provide substantial information to you in your needs assessment undertaking. For instance, if you are the director of an area council on aging and deal with the physical needs of senior citizens in a certain community, you definitely want to approach the local director at the senior citizen center in your region. You may also want to visit with administrators from nursing homes and community health centers in the district as well as the officials of local senior voluntary programs such as the Retired Teachers Association (R.T.A.), and the Retired Senior Volunteer

Program (R.S.V.P.).

Second, develop a listing of independent individuals in the community who have special knowledge and/or experience about the need areas to be addressed in the study. Continue your list by brainstorming for these individuals: Mr. Sam Johnson, who is an energetic volunteer helping with the local community programs on aging; Miss Sadie Russell, who has adopted several elder citizens from the nursing home as foster grandparents; and Colonel Sanders, who is the chairman of the local senior citizens club. You surely don't want to miss them while gathering need information.

Third, analyze these lists of institutional professionals and independent individuals in terms of the magnitude and uniqueness of their contribution to the realization of the goals you have identified as areas of inquiry in your needs assessment.

Fourth, decide on the institutional professionals and independent individual authorities whom you would actually approach in the needs assessment undertaking.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to identify representative authorities who are involved in making significant and unique contributions to the goals and target population of your study.

Determining Recorded Material

In this last section, we will discuss with you the basic types of printed information and help you to judge the

accessibility of each one of them in relation to your needs assessment undertaking.

Concept

Basically, recorded material is defined as data already collected and available. It might be statistical series, references, films, video tapes, or computer data banks containing information collected by persons or agencies for purposes other than your needs assessment. They may be government documents, census reports, service records, agency files, literature, documentary publications produced by professional associations, or research studies done both in the public and private sectors. For example, as a member of the recently formed community group, Citizens for a Healthy Hondo, you may have decided to study, among other things, potential substance abuse within the community as reflected by the following six measures: annual dollars spent on non-prescription relaxants, annual dollars spent on prescription relaxants, annual dollars spent on alcoholic beverages, annual dollars spent on cigarettes, annual dollars spent on coffee, and annual use of prohibited drug substances. You could approach a pharmacist for information on his or her inventory or sales records for non-prescriptive tranquilizers, sleeping preparations, and muscle relaxants. You could do the same for records on prescriptions. Supermarkets, gas stations, and convenience stores have records of volume of cigarette sales. Liquor stores have records of sales of

alcoholic beverages on at least an annual basis. For low alcoholic content beverages, again, records of convenience stores, supermarkets, and service stations could be tapped. Further, you may have access to the statewide study conducted in 1978 on substance abuse by regions within the state according to age and sex for the population over sixteen years of age. Other relevant recorded material might also be available to you in your needs assessment.

Process

We are now going to suggest three steps in the process for locating recorded material.

First, you will want to identify possible recorded material that will give you information relating to your area of inquiry. Brainstorm a list of known recorded materials. It might include federal, state or local government documents, research studies, service records, agency records, literature non-print media, publications produced by professional associations and/or news items in local newspapers. For example, let us assume that you are the director of community education in Delaware County and that one specific goal of your needs assessment undertaking is to improve the pre-vocational competence of young adults ages eighteen to twenty-one in your county. Your measures for this study are: number of young adults in the county with high school diplomas; number of young adults in the county with previous job experience; number of young adults in the county with

marketable skills; number of young adults in the county actively seeking jobs; number of young adults in the county knowledgeable of job openings; number of unemployed young adults in the county who have been fired from previous jobs; and the number of young adults in the county who have knowledge of information, dress, and behavior required in applying for a job. The recorded material which you might identify consist of: high school diplomas; academic records; student files; placement folders; personnel office records; employment office computer data bank records of applications, hirings, and dismissals; school district annual graduation reports; transcripts from college or vocational technical schools; and armed forces recruiting office records. You might even be able to locate a number of state or community studies addressing the vocational needs of young adults.

Second, you will want to analyze the recorded material in terms of its geographical, legal, political, ethical, and temporal accessibility. In other words, you should ask yourself a number of questions. First, is it physically possible for me to get hold of each specific document or is it now housed in Austin or at the Department of Defense or Education? Second, are there any legal constraints that prohibit me from obtaining the recorded material? Third, would there be any political reasons that the recorded material cannot or will not be made available? Fourth, would there be any ethical reason for the recorded material not to be

divulged? Fifth, would the recorded material have been destroyed because records are only maintained for limited periods of time? Using the above example, a large portion of the recorded material may be inaccessible because of one or more of the above considerations.

Finally, you will want to decide on those materials which are accessible to your study while deleting the recorded materials that are practically inaccessible.

In other words, the Principle for Practice is to identify the type of recorded material which is accessible for the study.

Summary

To refresh your memory, we would like to give you a brief summary of what we have presented in this chapter.

There are two major information sources that you can approach in conducting a needs assessment. They are the key informants, which includes target population and authorities, and recorded material.

Target population comprises individuals who are the subjects or focus for your study. This is the group that could speak directly about needs which they themselves possess. It is essential that you identify and describe at an early stage of your study the target population; namely a group of potential owners of needs.

Authorities are professionals from institutions or independent, knowledgeable individuals who are tapped to provide

information concerning the needs of others. A workable number of authorities who contribute much or contribute uniquely to the realization of the identified goals should be identified and approached for your study.

Finally, recorded material refers to all existing print and nonprint records which could be employed for your study. Your ultimate selection of information from these sources would depend on the accessibility of the sources.

We hope by now that you have become familiar with the various possible sources for need information and equipped with techniques to locate them efficiently. With this accomplished, we can address the different methods for gathering need information. This will be the main focus in the following chapter, Determining How to Gather Information.

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**Determining What
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CHAPTER IV
DETERMINING HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION

Introduction

Analogy

This booklet should be no more foreign to you than your favorite pastime of extracting a secret and delectable recipe from its protective inventor. This has got to be one of the more fascinating games that people play. An if ever you have played it, you have learned--probably the hard way--that what you see or what you taste is highly dependent upon the whys and wherefores of some very fancy maneuvers or strategies on your part.



Well, let us suppose that your neighbor has become a legend in the immediate vicinity for her silky cheesecake extravaganza. For years you have been itching to have the recipe in your repertoire of foods for special occasions. That is what you have wanted all along, for a long time. You've often tried many tricks of your own to try and approximate her recipe, but to no avail. You and your neighbors have even compared what you did in arriving at your futile

results. Now you have decided upon a more aggressive approach. You politely ask for the recipe. What you get is, "I don't want to give it out because if you use it and do something wrong, you will pass the blame on to me, and that will be the end of my fame in the cheesecake circle." You next suggest --after a respectable interlude--that she join you as one of the chefs for the Elks annual fund-raising dinner. Together, you both can prepare a cheesecake dessert. What you get this time is, "It would be an offense against the palate to serve cheesecake as a dessert for a pancake and sausage roundup." Again, some months have passed, you encourage her to enter the annual "dessert recipe of the year" contest which is being run by the city newspaper. What you get here is, "Those judges lack any sense of fine cuisine; they have grown up on nothing but barbeque and beans. I have no interest in subjecting my 'prize' to the indignities of such common folk." At one point you seriously consider breaking and entering, but dismiss this as too sloppy an approach. Finally, you broach the subject again. The occasion is the first visit, in a three year period, of your mother- and father-in-law. You would like your neighbor to do her part in building family relationships by parting with her recipe. She grudgingly agrees. You make the cheesecake, and it is a prize. At last, you finally struck the right chord and you were able to get the information you so desperately wanted. Count your blessings, you may not have been so fortunate. Some of us have lived through friendships in which a special ingredient or procedure was omitted when the recipe was conveyed and all was not well.

Strategies to gather information are much the same as strategies to extract recipes. Alternative approaches need to be considered so that what appears most likely to succeed will be chosen. It is a fine art and care must be taken to insure that you get what you are after, nothing more and nothing less.

Purpose

Having been introduced to techniques for identifying and locating the major sources of information for your needs assessment, you will now be presented with procedures for gathering that information. The purpose of this chapter is to help you to develop and select strategies that are feasible for you in your particular situation and that can provide you with valid and reliable information in the needs assessment

process. An almost limitless array of strategies exist for gathering data in the needs assessment process. No one single strategy is the best strategy at all times to obtain all kinds of information from all sources of your information. Depending on the type of information for which you are searching, the source which you have available to you, as well as other practical, real world constraints, consideration must be given to each alternative retrieval strategy to insure that the optimal strategy and/or strategies will be employed.

The chapter will consist of three major focuses. The first focus is determining retrieval strategies for obtaining need information from the target population you have identified for your needs assessment; the second focus is upon determining retrieval strategies for the authorities, and the third focus is the determination of retrieval strategies for recorded materials. Here, we will provide you with guidelines for extracting data from the recorded materials which are relevant and available to you in your study. Then, in the following chapter, Determining How to Organize Information, we will show you ways of organizing your information once you have gathered it.

Determining Retrieval Strategies (Target Population)

In this section we will discuss some major strategies for retrieving information from your target population and

guide you in the process of selecting those strategies that are feasible and are most able to provide you with valid and reliable information for your needs assessment.

Concept

A retrieval strategy (target population) is defined as a method whereby data relative to human needs are obtained from potential owners of needs. For instance, you may choose to reach the target population of your needs study through some form of survey, through a group concerns meeting, and through some selective personal observations. Each of these approaches carries with it unique advantages as well as disadvantages. To make the best use of each approach, it is important for you to be able to recognize these advantages and disadvantages.

By way of a specific example, let us suppose that you have been assigned full-time by the corporate training manager for Texas Instruments to do a "feasibility study" on the development of corporate post-retirement career preparation programs for pre-retirement employees and their spouses. You have been allocated six months for your study, have been provided with an assistant, a secretary, and a budget of \$20,000 for non-personnel expenditures. Assuming that you have made careful determinations regarding the information with which you ought to fortify yourself and the ideal key informants (target population and authorities) and recorded materials to consult, the following scenario

is quite likely in terms of your target population data collection strategies. You make plans for an extended on-site visitation of the two model programs currently in the third year of operation within a sister industry in the country. You make plans for observing the operation and for meeting with current participants, "enlistees" and "graduates" of the program. You also make plans for open plant meetings for the employees of T. I. ages forty and over and their spouses, as well as plans for a mailed survey of personnel retired from T. I. within the past two years.

Process

To identify comprehensive, valid, reliable, and feasible strategies for retrieving information from the target population of your needs assessment, we propose that you follow four steps:

First, develop an extensive listing of the possible strategies for retrieving data from your target population. One type of strategy would involve individuals responding independently to your stimulus questions; mailed questionnaire surveys, personal individual interviews, telephone studies, newspaper, or other media surveys are of this first type. A second type of strategy would involve the retrieval of data from groups of people; open forums, panel discussions, town meetings, information sharing groups, seminars, workshops, conferences, or meetings with an advisory group

are of this second type. In addition, don't forget that there are numerous informal ways of reaching the target population in your needs assessment.

Second, having identified your target population for the needs assessment and a list of alternative retrieval strategies, you will want to identify some characteristics of that group. This procedure has several important consequences: first, you will be in a better position to identify a sample of the target population when you begin to gather information (if it is not realistic to survey the entire target group), and second, you will be in a better position to summarize and interpret your data once they have been gathered. The best way to start identifying the characteristics of your target population is to take a serious look at the goals you have chosen to study at the same time you look at your selected target population. Perhaps, as an extension agent, your goals include: the improvement of nutrition, the development of responsible fiscal budgeting, and the improvement of housekeeping maintenance. Let us also suppose that your target population consists of all women in the rural communities. What are some of the ways you could identify critical characteristics of such a large and diverse target population? What characteristics or descriptions are likely to be important given the target population of women and the three goals for study? We would suggest, as a start, that age, economic bracket of household, number of persons

in household, farm or non-farm household, section of the county, and employment status might be important characteristics to consider. These characteristics are important because they help you picture more clearly just exactly how diverse your target population is likely to be. Fortified with such an awareness, you will be in an excellent position to identify a representative sample of this target population as key informants for your study. Further, recording these characteristics during the data collection process will help you determine who in the target population actually have some needs; it may be exclusively the non-farm women or those raising five dependents on welfare checks and food stamps. Obviously, needs will surface for some subgroups but not for all of your target population. Knowing this and collecting this kind of information ultimately will enable you to target your educational and service programs. Many population characteristics can be classified as they relate to personal status like age, sex, race, native tongue, and citizenship; to residence, like place of residence or type of residence; to affiliation, like religious affiliation and membership in community groups; to family, like marital status, number of children, and members of household; and to socio-economic status, like years of school completed, income per year and occupation. However we should not hesitate to identify other characteristics which are appropriate given the goals and the

target population of the study.

Third, compare the relative advantages and disadvantages of each strategy. Will the strategy provide valid and reliable information? Will it give you a comprehensive picture of your target population? Is it feasible? Let us look at another example. You, the Associate Director of the Valley Co-op, have just received funding from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Division of Adult Programs, to conduct a pilot program in nutrition education for migrant women in the Valley. You have decided a needs assessment is appropriate. You are anxious to learn how these women perceive their needs. You have decided on a mailed survey questionnaire. Hold everything! Mailed questionnaires have been employed very effectively in the past in various settings to determine nutritional needs of women, so it is not an untried method of data collection. But, do migrant families have addresses that would make postal service delivery likely? Are all migrant women literate in the language of the survey? Are they apt to be skeptical of responding for fear of some powerful entrapment? Are they ashamed of their conditions and of what they feel would be an imposition of anglo eating customs and norms? Has "schooling" ever been a positive force in their lives? Would a mailed survey--assuming it was deliverable and could be read--be an appropriate data collection strategy given the major attitudinal barriers that are likely to exist?

So, in general, it might be safe to say that a mailed questionnaire in a survey allows wide coverage with minimum expense; affords wide geographical contact; reaches people who are difficult to locate; and gives the respondent time to respond, opportunity to consult with someone else and a chance to respond independently. It is also possible to say that in general the mailed questionnaire provides no guarantee of response rate, provides no guarantee of the ability or willingness of the respondents to provide information and provides no guarantee against the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpreting the items in the questionnaire since there is no opportunity for probing questions or observations on the part of an interviewer.

Problems likewise can occur with telephone surveys, newspaper surveys, or even door to door interviews. Further, strategies that involve interpersonal group interaction like consensus meetings, town meetings, and such are likewise rarely the perfect solution.

Now, you might wonder which single strategy or collection of strategies would best serve your own needs assessment undertaking. Unfortunately, there are no universally accepted answers, but there are guidelines which you can follow; namely, review each strategy against the backdrop of what information you wish to collect and from whom you wish to collect it, then rigorously note the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy. A caution is in order. It is

helpful to remember that, regardless of the approach which you choose, there will be limitations inherent in that approach and you must be aware of those limitations if you want the strategy to work to your advantage.

Further, in this our third step, we suggest that you analyze the availability of human skills, personnel, time, finances, and physical resources either within your institution or which are otherwise at your disposal for the needs assessment undertaking. Those strategies which you ultimately select must be feasible.

Fourth, you should select those data collection strategies which provide you with the most valid, comprehensive, and reliable information and which are at the same time feasible for you. In other words, make sure the strategies you employ will provide you with the answers you are seeking and would elicit comparable responses were you to question similar groups or the same group at a later date.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to select comprehensive, valid, reliable, and feasible information retrieval strategies for your target population.

Determining Retrieval Strategies (Authorities)

In this section we will review the concept of, and procedures for, determining retrieval strategies for the authorities selected for your needs assessment.

Concept

A retrieval strategy (authority) is a method whereby

data relative to human needs are obtained from knowledgeable professionals/authorities. Let us say, for instance, you the coordinator of a newly established Training Center for Small Business Management, have decided to start your curriculum building process with a needs assessment. Certainly you would want to obtain information from proprietors of small businesses in your community, your target population. However, it is also imperative to obtain some input from special authorities. A listing of some of those who might be considered would include lawyers, real estate agents, bank officers, and Chamber of Commerce representatives, to name but a few. The question facing you now, however, is how best to obtain the information which these authorities possess.

Process

To identify valid, reliable, and feasible strategies for retrieving information from your authority group, we suggest that you follow the three steps which we propose:

First, develop an extensive listing of the possible strategies for retrieving data from your authorities. As you will recall from our discussion on retrieving information from your target population, strategies will either involve obtaining the information as independent responses from each individual authority or obtaining responses from the authorities as a collective body: survey questionnaires, telephone or face to face meeting, task force meetings, and conference calls are but a few of the retrieval alternatives available

to you.

Second, analyze these strategies in terms of their validity, reliability, and feasibility. Again, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the strategy has to be the right fit for both the kind of information you are seeking and the collection of authorities you have selected as respondents. Of course, as always, balanced against these two considerations is the issue of feasibility.

Third, you should select those data collection, or retrieval strategies, which provide you with the most valid and reliable information and which are at the same time feasible for you.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to select valid, reliable, and feasible information retrieval strategies for your authorities.

Determining Retrieval Strategies (Recorded Material)

In the following section we will present some retrieval strategies for extracting quality need data from relevant and available recorded materials.

Concept

A retrieval strategy (recorded material) is a method whereby valid and reliable need data can be secured from available and relevant recorded material. A retrieval strategy indicates the way that you actually extract the relevant data from some available document or record.

There are six factors that have been identified and are generally recognized which bear directly upon the quality of the data you retrieve from available recorded materials. They are the factors of purpose, definition, geographical coverage, population, time frame and methodology. All recorded material which you are considering for use within your needs assessment should be examined in light of these six factors.

For example, suppose that you are the Director of Patient Education at the state hospital in Rusk and you are going to study the "coping" needs of the short-term adults in your institution. Over the past two years you have become increasingly convinced of a single and overriding patient need. It lies in the area of patients' growing perception of themselves as dependent members of the hospital community and a gradual diminishing of the vision of themselves as active, independent, and contributing members of the community from which they came to the institution. Your concern is how to assist each person to see himself or herself as effective and at peace in the larger society. You have access to the following recorded material: current patient records of the hospital, a 5-year-old study conducted by the hospital at the time of its anticipated demise at the hands of the state legislature, a 3-year-old state-wide study of patient profiles within the state institutions, and records on all adult students enrolled in your educational program. In reviewing

information from each of these sources, ask yourself why the data shown in the records were collected, if these records were looking at coping needs the same way you are, what geographical area was covered, what population was studied, how long ago the data was collected, and what methods were used to collect the data. When you compare the answers to these questions to the purpose of your needs assessment, you should be able to determine whether or not the information shown on such a record is appropriate for you to use in your needs study: whether it is completely compatible and can be taken as it is, whether it is comparable but in need of some adaptation or adjustment, or whether your review reveals that one or more of the factors is completely incompatible with your study and consequently the document must be discarded. Remember, if the recorded material isn't right for your purposes, don't use it.

Process

We suggest a three step procedure in retrieving data from relevant and accessible recorded material:

First, we recommend that you describe each of the recorded materials which you have identified in terms of the six critical factors: purpose, definition, geographical coverage, population, time frame, and methodology.

Second, you are asked to assess the recorded materials in terms of the objectivity of its purpose; the closeness of its operational definitions--measures--to those employed in

your needs assessment; the coincidence of its geographical coverage to the service area addressed in your needs assessment; the matching of the respondents reported upon in the study of the recorded materials to the target population in your needs assessment; the amount of time which has elapsed between when data was collected and subsequently organized as recorded material, in addition to the time which will have elapsed between the initial data retrieval and yours; and lastly, the rigor of the methodology employed in collecting data for the recorded material.

Perhaps you are the newly appointed Training Director for Texas Legal Assistance Society (TLAS), Inc., a private, non-profit organization of 25 part-time lawyers, 3 full-time lawyers, 25 full-time paralegal personnel and a limitless number of potential clients. You have been provided with a "manual" which served as a guide for all training undertaken by the previous training director. It details what each workshop in a three year cycle should address. Legal Assistance Society, Inc. has decided to conduct a short term legal education assistance program for the Cuban immigrants currently relocated in El Paso. Obviously, our new training director has access to key informants but she also has a very critical document at her disposal. But, here again, she must consider the six questions before "buying" all or part of the document as a definitive statement for the direction of the short term training program. What about the suitability of the manual

in terms of its purpose, its content, its geographical coverage, the target group, the "age" of the information, and the process of its development. Now, within this brief illustration, and lacking further elaboration, one might reasonably assume that use of one of the "canned" client workshops would leave something to be desired. It was developed as a training response to the routine types of learning needs manifest among legal, paralegal, and client groups associated with TLAS, Inc. Thus, its purpose and content are suspect at least as far as the intended group is concerned. In like manner its coverage of "Texas" law and rights and responsibilities for the resident is far afield from a group of Spanish speaking immigrants only temporarily located in Texas and likely to be located elsewhere. Lastly, the method involved in the development of the manual might well be suspect as well as its "age," for oftentimes such products grow out of "success" events and are given a stature and a permanence not warranted by the facts or by the passage of time.

Third, after having analyzed the recorded material, make your decision. Select that material which is completely applicable to your needs assessment study on all six factors. Make the modifications called for when the data are not completely congruent with your needs assessment. So, if, as the president of the Christian Churches United, your target population in the needs assessment is unmarried mothers ages

sixteen to twenty-one in the Austin area, and if you happen to find several research studies done nationwide on unmarried mothers, you must be careful to retrieve only that data that has relevance to the geographical area and the population addressed in your particular needs assessment. And, to keep you honest as well as to enable repeated access to this or similar material, we advise you to describe and justify any adjustments made. When you are well aware of the limitations of your retrieved need data, then you will not tend to over-generalize. Lastly, discard that printed information which is judged inappropriate.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to select information retrieval strategies from recorded material in terms of its compatability to your study.

Summary

We have presented to you in this chapter three major types of strategies by which you can feasibly gather information for your needs assessment undertaking. Retrieval strategies for target population and authorities are approaches that you use to actually reach your key informants in the needs assessment.

Retrieval strategies for recorded material are methods which are capable of eliciting quality needs data from the available recorded material. Each potential recorded resource for the needs assessment undertaking should be appraised in terms of the compatibility of its purpose, definition,

geographical coverage, population, time frame, and methodology to that of your needs assessment. The information appraised can then be either adopted, adapted, or discarded.

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**Determining What
Information To Collect**

**Determining Where
Information Can Be Found**

**Determining How To
Gather Information**



**Determining How To
Summarize Information**

**Determining How To
Interpret Information**

A CONCLUSION TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT

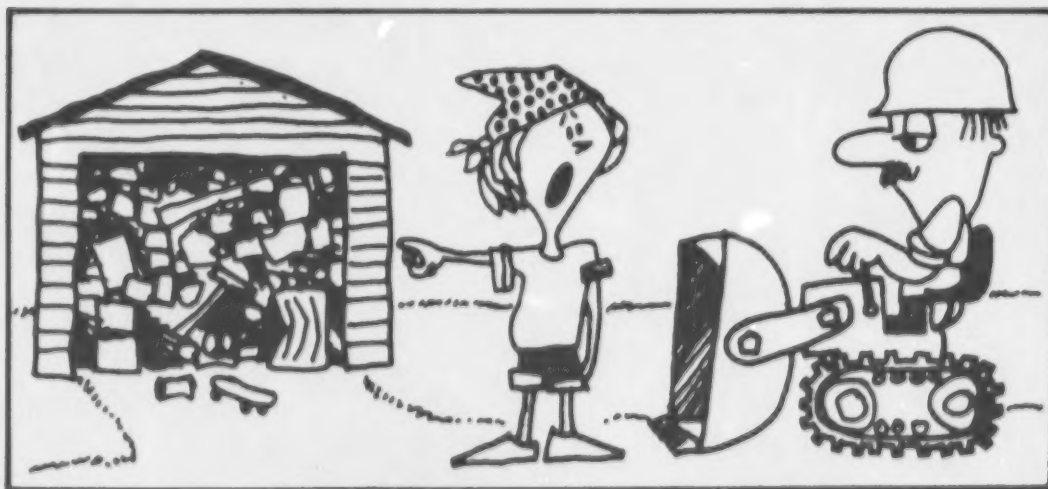
CHAPTER V

DETERMINING HOW TO SUMMARIZE INFORMATION

Introduction

Analogy

This booklet is not a lot unlike spring cleaning. If you can identify with this near universal ritual of modern day America, you should have a good experiential and intuitive grasp of the type of thing we are encouraging in this instructional booklet.



Let us suppose that it is the first day of spring cleaning mania and that you have decided to begin with the garage. Well, here you are faced with a great array of, let us say, "items", for want of a more suitable word. You are faced with this array which represents what you very carefully and studiously have decided to collect over the years. They are items which, regardless of their present value, were imbued with meaning at the time that you decided that they were what you wanted. Needless to say, you went to great trouble and expense to obtain in many different ways these items from many different sources and corners of the globe. You obtained some of them as heirlooms from past generations of relatives;

you collected other of the items at garage sales no less; others you may have bartered for by trading a much prized skill in return; and some, your "handyman" or "handywoman" may have created out of the sweat of the brow. But at any rate, here it is. What now? It has gradually become the all engulfing monster and has over time grown to ill-advised proportions. Furthermore, it is all over the place so that even what might still be of value is unable to be used because it lies hidden in a mountain of things.

Well, what most "order bugs" do is clear some shelves, resale tables, precious closets, and vacuous cartons; get the dump cans handy; and set to work. As you not-so-fondly handle most of the items, decisions must be made. First on the order is to determine if you keep it, discard it, or save it for resale. That which no longer serves your purposes generally gets tossed unless you can identify friend, foe, or relative who may want it; and then it goes into a specially marked carton. Or possibly if it is at all salvageable, it goes onto the resale table. After those items are gotten out of the array, you are left with what you genuinely feel has meaning for you and can serve some utilitarian or aesthetic purpose which you have. For example, you are left with five partially filled cans of latex paint in the colors of white, cream ivory, blue, and fuscina. Do you put them away separately, for they are perfectly good, or do you make an effort to combine some or all of the cans for a garage repaint job? Well, just like the paint, some items can and possibly should be combined, and may be so combined without harming an otherwise perfectly good item. Perhaps all of the old and worn children's undies and sis' well run hose will be put together as filling for the stuffed dolls which are to be made for the Church bazaar in the fall. Other things should be left as they are and finally stored on shelves with like items for easy use and retrieval as needed down the road: the tools, the toys, the paints, the solvents, the cleaning equipment, and the lawn furniture.

This process of tossing, combining, and organizing things goes on in the needs assessment process also. After you have gone through the process of collecting the information which you felt would be meaningful for future use, you now need to put it in order for such future use.

Purpose

In this chapter we will present a procedure for summarizing information that you have collected for your needs assessment. Once you have collected your data, you will want to subject them to an effective and discriminating

selection process so that only the most critical needs are highlighted for subsequent analysis and treatment. For in the summarizing process you are refining the information collected into a concise data base which serves not only as a readily available record of critical information, but also as a workable inventory upon which decisions on future program alternatives can be based.

We will help you to filter out certain data that evolved from the information collection processes so that only the most critical data is retained. You will also be advised of ways to transform or combine the need data in order to avoid information overload. Last, but not least, we will show you methods for organizing or categorizing information into a format that is most appropriate for your institutional use. Following this, in our next chapter, Determining How to Interpret Information, we will shift our attention to the identification of forces that affect needs. That is, you will learn how to interpret information and thereby diagnose needs.

Filtering Need Information

In this section, we are going to orient you to the concept of filtering need information and we will suggest some criteria to consider in the data screening procedure.

Concept

Filtration is defined as the process of selectively screening out certain data on the basis of clearly defined

criteria for the purpose of removing non-critical data from the information system. It is a process in which you disregard information gathered that is not usable. In doing this, of course, some criteria must be identified to facilitate the screening process. We propose that you establish your standards based on four criteria: first, the indication of the existence of a need; second, the magnitude of the indicated need in terms of the discrepancy between the present state and the desired state of affairs; third, the immediacy of the identified need in terms of an anticipated pattern of change over time; and fourth, the instrumental value of the need as related to resolution of other needs.

Say, for example, that the county extension agent in Grimes County conducted a study of the felt needs of the senior citizens within the county and obtained their following perceptions of need: 48% felt their kin and friendship circles were inadequate, 30% felt that personal and public transportation resources were inadequate, 26% perceived their daily diets to be substandard, 67% claimed to have no program of daily physical activity or exercise, 55% reported that their economic resources were severely limited; 2% reported that they were unable to care for their necessary household maintenance, 61% reported inadequacy of medical care for their health needs, and 34% reported that they felt ill prepared for "single" living.

Having gathered the data, the agent found that the felt

needs differ in these eight areas. In order to decide what information should be retained, in each instance, the agent needs to ask himself the four questions. First, is there a need? Second, is it a large or a small need? Third, does it appear that the need is going to resolve itself? Fourth, is this need preventing or facilitating the resolution of other needs?

Process

Now, we will describe the three steps which can be taken to assist you in filtering need information according to the four criteria proposed.

One of the burdens of the filtration procedure is to analyze information according to whether or not a need is present. All raw data which indicates that no needs exist should be set aside in the present needs assessment undertaking. Information you collect may fail to indicate the presence of a need either for the target population as a whole or for any subportions of the population. If you have conscientiously exercised care in the early stages of the needs assessment in identifying only those goals assumed to be both important and unrealized, you will probably achieve only a slight reduction in bulk by this task. If, as the director for the adult vocational programs in Warren I.S.D., you send out questionnaires to a group of high-school drop-outs ages sixteen through twenty-one, and try to pinpoint the vocational needs of this target population, you

may find that none of the respondents who had dropped out before completion of the tenth grade indicated an interest in going back to school for formal academic training in reading, writing, arithmetic, or to obtain their G.E.D. certificate. Instead, 90% said they would prefer some short-term courses in specific vocational skills, like welding or carpentry. All of the respondents in this group also indicated that they were holding down some kind of regular job. In this case, it would be appropriate for you to disregard the raw data relating to formal schooling and concentrate on the vocational need data for this group as indicated. It might be possible that for non-respondents and for respondents who have completed the tenth grade, academic needs would have emerged. Further, had data been collected from authorities such as personnel officers in area businesses, state and independent employment agencies, and high school and community college counselors, a very different assessment may have resulted for the early high school drop-out group and a critical need may have been indicated. It is important to respect the integrity of both groups of key informants and to deal creatively with the discrepancies between the two groups during the program building phase.

You should analyze the need data according to the magnitude of the discrepancy between the present state and the desired state of affairs. You can expect to find some instances in which a need is found to exist, but the

discrepancy identified between the present state and the desired state of affairs is small in an absolute sense. All other things being equal, a larger discrepancy indicates a need of greater import. For example, as chairman of the board of the San Angelo Society of Culture and the Arts, you are about to undertake a feasibility study concerning the establishment of a regional public museum. You are interested in determining if there is a need for a museum in your area and if so, what type of museum. As part of your study, you have determined that there are no other public museums within a fifty mile radius of San Angelo. Your initial survey of the general community was conducted in the San Angelo Daily Times. People were asked to complete the survey and either mail it to the society or bring it in to any of the businesses within the community. Ninety percent of the households completed the questionnaires. All households agreed that a community museum supported by volunteer efforts, patron fees, and foundation support would be desirable for the region. The following breakdown of interest was revealed by the survey: 98% of the households were interested in the history of greater San Angelo, 82% in the industry in San Angelo, 80% in the arts and crafts of the region, 46% in the natural science/geology, and life forms in the region, 24% in the anthropology in the region, 12% in the architecture of the region, and 7% in the science and technology of the region. The board has decided, based upon survey

response, to proceed further in testing the feasibility of a Museum of Greater San Angelo which would include: history, industry, arts and crafts, and natural science. Interest in architecture, anthropology, and science and technology was not judged to be great enough to warrant development at this time.

You would analyze the need data in terms of an anticipated pattern of change over time. A pattern of rapid deterioration indicates a sense of immediacy and signals the presence of a need of greater import. A stabilized state of need, or a need tending to lessen, may be judged as generally of lesser immediacy and consequently of lesser import. For example, if the juvenile delinquency rate of Waller County was 23% of the youth population in 1960, but rose to 28% in 1970 and 36% in 1980, you may quickly come to the conclusion that a segment of the youth in this county has a problem. The Sheriff's Department, the Municipal Police Departments, and concerned citizens see youth delinquency as a major and worsening problem with no end in sight unless programs to remediate the problem are undertaken. The major data gathered in their study subsequently revealed a critically escalating delinquency rate among twelve- to sixteen-year-olds, especially young boys, minorities, products of broken homes, drop outs and those on public assistance, as well as an alarming increase in the crime rate for both boys and girls within the highly affluent community.

You would also analyze the need data in terms of their instrumental value to the resolution of other needs. Those needs that are linked to other needs and which if remediated would contribute positively to the resolution of a number of other needs would deserve immediate attention. In other words, those needs that might not be instrumental to the resolution of other needs could be filtered out for the time being, especially if they are likely to be resolved by addressing other needs first. Say, as the Program Chairman for the Abilene County American Association of University Women, you find the following needs from your assessment: 60% of the rural women are illiterate, 40% of the women in the county are surviving on public assistance, 12% of the women hold a college degree, 72% of the women never held a job for pay, 67% of the women lack a high school diploma, 80% of the women are anxious to move into the job market, and 92% of the women report no marketable skill. It is possible that the basic literacy needs, the general educational needs, and the pre-vocational and vocational needs are indeed critical. Further,⁴ their resolution may likely change the unemployment and public assistance rate significantly. Therefore, the "foundation" needs have been selected as the focus for future program emphasis in the five year plan for the Association.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to filter information according to the existence of a need and according to its magnitude, immediacy, and instrumentality.

Combining Need Information

Let us now suppose that you have successfully filtered all noncritical information from your data base. What you have remaining may or may not be in the best form for utilization. But, analysis, storage, reporting, and manipulation of raw data can frequently be greatly facilitated by its translation from one form to another.

Concept

Combination is defined as the process of changing data from one form to another to reduce information overload and enhance the decision-making process. Combination is sometimes used interchangeably with the term data reduction, and potentially it results in data expressed as an aggregate or global need rather than as many discrete or smaller needs. Combination is critical and central to reduction of information overload in all kinds of information systems. You should keep in mind, however, that although data cannot be combined in all instances nor in an indiscriminate fashion, there are situations when this procedure is appropriate. To be a maximally effective and efficient information system, it is not sufficient only to focus on need data judged important in terms of magnitude, immediacy, and instrumental value, but also to combine or group the data to further facilitate the decision-making processes.

For example, the director of a senior center might combine the following senior citizen needs: 40% nutritional

inadequacy and 67% first aid skills inadequacy, by saying there is an overall average of 51% need in health related areas among senior citizens. Similarly, other data may reveal a 92% economic need among minorities and among widowed members of the senior community. Or, your data may reveal a 72% need in social services as described by select authorities and a 78% need in the same services as described by the target group. In this instance, the director may combine these data into a 75% need since both groups' assertion of the need are almost identical and certainly highly compatible in nature.

Process

The information for the needs assessment process as we describe it can be combined through a three step process:

First, review all of the data which you have collected in your needs assessment process.

Second, analyze your data according to either the type of target populations or subpopulations as well as according to the type of goals. In the first instance, you may be able to combine your need data according to population characteristics that indicate some differences in the identified need for particular subgroups. So, if, as the director of the Arlington Recreation Department, you are going to study the social needs of young adults ages 16-25, you may probably find your need data falls rather naturally into distinct categories according to sex, age groups, ethnicity, and

marital status. For example, young married couples want opportunities for kicker and square dancing group activities, while the single young adults want opportunities to form theatre production teams. Your data may therefore be able to be combined into two need statements rather than a great many need statements. In the second instance, you can combine your need data according to some major goals. For example, if, as the director of Community Education in Belmont ISD, you are going to study vocational needs of the Hispanic ethnic minority in your district, three possible goals for the study might be identified: to increase vocational skills, to upgrade prevocational skills, and to cultivate good work habits. It is understood that you are using several measures of need for each of the three goals developed. However, in order to simplify and reduce the absolute mass of the data which you have collected, you explore the possibility of combining the data into some global statements of need, in this instance, the three global needs in the goal areas identified for your study. Data reveal the following needs: 20% need in adequacy of formal academic schooling, 50% need in adequacy of marketable skills, 47% need in adequacy of vocational training, and 92% need in adequacy of work experience. These data may possibly be combined into a 52% need in vocational skills. Similarly, data may have been collected and varying degrees of need revealed in terms of punctuality, proper dressing code,

appropriate manners in the work setting, responsible completion of work assignments, ability to take orders in the work place, and ability to get along with others. These data may lend themselves to being combined into a single statement of need for cultivation of good work habits.

Third, decide on an appropriate combining of your data. It is necessary, however, that you exercise care against the liberal use of the method of combination. In all forms of data combination you will have to compromise the individuality and specificity of need data collected against the simplicity and manageability of data collected. The benefits of the combination process must outweigh the costs or the process should not be employed.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to combine information according to populations or subpopulations and goals.

Organizing Need Information

Now that you have completed manipulating the data that you had collected, you are ready to begin preparing the results of the study for presentation to the interested parties. Whether you terminate the needs assessment at this point of the process with simply the identification of a number of needs of certain populations or sub-populations, or whether you carry the process through to the interpretation of the causes of those needs, you should organize the needs into meaningful clusters in order to facilitate appropriate subsequent action.

Concept

Organization is defined as the process of arranging need information. It is a process to put in order information that has already been filtered and combined. The purpose of organization is to provide for the presentation of data in formats most appropriate for the institutional users. Some professionals working in the education of adults are involved with institutions whose function is defined primarily in terms of one or several goals or missions and only nominally in terms of subgroups or large groups within the community. Other practitioners, however, are involved with institutions whose function is defined primarily in terms of subgroups or target groups within the community and may provide services directed toward the attainment of several or many broad goals for their target group. You can accommodate these different perspectives by organizing the need data according to both the goals and target groups.

Process

There are three major tasks to perform which will help you arrange or organize information when presenting the needs identified in your study to your own or other interested organizations:

First, review the data which have been collected in the needs assessment process. You can organize the need information according to the goals which you identified for your study. The Director of the Community Education School, thus,

might organize the data derived in the needs assessment according to the following two goals. The need to attain a high school diploma or G.E.D. certificate is found in the following proportion among members of the community: Hispanic women 57%, high school drop-out ages 14-25 100%, members in retirement centers 15%, and displaced homemakers 36%. The need to attain marketable vocational skills is found distributed in the following manner: adults in districts 1 and 7 60%, displaced homemakers 96%, high school drop-outs 64%, recently physically disabled 69%, and mentally retarded in the community 97%. This type of listing will enable the director, as he moves to the analysis or interpretation of these needs both to avoid overgeneralization and to look for specific multiple causes for academic and vocational needs to exist in varying populations. Or if, on the other hand, the director is now about to begin programs, he may decide on a path of co-sponsorship of the vocational programs with the community college and vocational technical institute in his region. Thus, this manner of listing will enable various actions to be taken relative to the goals identified as important and unrealized on several levels within his community.

Second, analyze the data which have been collected according to goals and populations or subpopulations. It also may be advantageous to organize the information according to populations or subpopulations in your needs

assessment undertaking. You will then be displaying the needs relating to many different goals under specific groups in your population. Referring back to the previous example, the following is a conceivable ordering according to target groups. Under the needs of displaced homemakers would be found: 36% lack a high school diploma or G.E.D. certificate, 96% lack marketable vocational skill, 67% lack pre-vocational competence, and 84% lack social/emotional support systems. Listing the needs of members of retirement centers would reveal that 15% lack a high school diploma or G.E.D. certificate, 84% lack recreational skills, 92% lack religious involvement, 64% lack physical exercise, and 70% lack social involvement with the community. This type of listing enables the director to plan concerted and integrated programs for specific target groups and their myriad needs. It may even highlight alternatives for remediating the social/emotional adjustment concerns of the displaced homemaker through meeting the needs for social involvement with the community of the members of retirement centers.

Third, decide on the manner in which you will organize your data.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to organize information collected according to goals and populations or sub-populations.

Summary

We have provided you with the process for summarizing

the information you have collected by filtering, combining, and organizing the data into a workable format for your needs assessment.

Filtration is a process for selectively screening out certain data that are not critical to your study. You should disregard information that indicates the absence of a need, a need that is small in magnitude, a stable need or a need state that is tending to improve, or a need that has little instrumental relationship to the resolution of other needs.

Combination is a procedure of translating or changing data from one form to another in order to reduce information overload. Information collected can be combined on the basis of populations or goals.

Finally, organization is a process of arranging related data into organized formats. It facilitates the presentation of results of your study and enhances the decision-making processes. It is advised that needs assessors should organize information collected according to goals and according to populations.

In order to interpret your findings effectively to your institution or other interested groups, you may want to explore forces or situations that are at work causing the needs to exist. The definition of these forces and their effect upon needs is the main theme of our next chapter, Determining How to Interpret Information.

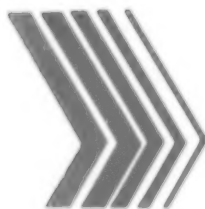
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CHAPTER VI

DETERMINING HOW TO INTERPRET INFORMATION

Introduction

Analogy

This booklet is very much like getting at the root of a problem. Let us suppose that the problem is about fleas and ticks, and that adorable pet of yours whom you are about to christen either "Mobile Flea Market #1" or the "Tick and Flea Capital of North Gulch".



Those who have lived through such infestations would certainly not hesitate to say, "We have a problem." Something must be done. However, just knowing that you have a problem--one dog with ticks and fleas--is not the end of your quest. If you have any plans to do something about the situation--and all of sane mind would--you will want to know why, all of a sudden, you are overrun with the varmints because, obviously, a number of alternatives lie before you in terms of removing the problem. These alternatives may range from doing the poor dog in, to sending him on an extended visit to the in-laws, to mowing the lawn, to spraying the carpets and drapes, to heaven knows what. You see, in fact, a lot of dogs have

ticks and fleas, a lot of people are faced with the problem; and before energy, time, and money is invested in changing the situation, it only makes sense to see really what is causing the problem. Maybe your pet has been dipped monthly and never was infested before. Maybe your children brought in a mutt from the neighborhood and that is what precipitated the onslaught. Perhaps, it is just that you have moved into a home in which an infested pet had lived with the previous owners. The fleas' period of dormancy has passed; the pests are raring to go, and your pet is just what they are looking for. Perhaps, it has saved the day that you have just engaged Orkin for quarterly extermination services and that has provided some protection. Perhaps, your youngster is a hiking enthusiast and has gotten the spring hiking bug again, along with a few other bugs--namely ticks and fleas. If this is the case, then you may simply wish to turn your garage into a debriefing center.

In effect, prior to any of your decisions to act upon a problem situation, you either intuitively or very explicitly detail what is causing the situation to exist. Only then can you be armed with what you could call a reasonable interpretation of the meaning of the situation, with an awareness of what is at work. Then, and only then, are you prepared to select from among the causes of the problem and eliminate the causes one by one. Or, as in the case of having recently engaged Orkin, capitalize on that effect and have them come for an additional interim visit. Action that attempts to get at the causes is generally the only realistic approach to changing a situation with which you are faced. A frontal attack on the ticks and fleas though laudable may help win the battle, but it will never conquer the war.

In this booklet we will be helping you to determine in the most accurate way why the needs which have been identified so far in the needs assessment process exist. Armed with this information, you will be fully prepared for action, namely, to build programs which will eliminate needs by attacking the problem at its roots.

Purpose

This chapter is written to serve multiple purposes.

First, we will help you to determine forces impacting the need which you have identified. Secondly, in a manner very similar to what we have presented to you in the three preceding chapters, we will assist you in determining the sources of force data, the appropriate strategies for

gathering this force information and the proper methods for summarizing your force information.

Now, having identified the existence of some discrepancies or needs within your target population, you still are not in the best position to start program planning. Needs do not exist in a vacuum and in order to fully understand and adequately respond to the need you must tap into these underlying and sometimes hidden causes, influences, or forces. It is only with an understanding of the forces impacting needs that we can know what should be done to reduce or eliminate the need. In other words, identification of the key forces impacting a need will give us direction for alternate programs and thus provide us with a potential vehicle for action.

it is our belief that provided with sufficient information on the existing needs as well as the forces impacting such needs, you will be in an ideal position to bring closure to your needs assessment undertaking and to begin some program planning to remediate the needs. You will have identified and diagnosed needs.

Determining Forces Impacting Needs

The main focus in this section is the introduction of the concept of force. We will also orient you to the process of identifying positive and negative forces that are of significant strength in impacting needs.

Concept

Force is defined as any physical, social or psychological entity which contributes either to the magnification or reduction of a need. Forces are, when taken in their entirety, those factors responsible for a given condition or need. They affect, either positively or negatively, an identified discrepancy in human strivings with varying degrees of intensity. It is commonly assumed that conditions exist because no one has tried to make the conditions any different. However, when a condition is examined more closely, it becomes clear that there are a large number and variety of forces at work which, together, prevent substantial changes of any kind from occurring. For example, as Director of the Bexar County Women's Center, you are concerned at the low level employment of female heads of households in the county, a 78% unemployment rate. Ultimately, if you are to change this situation of need, you must identify probable forces at work, determine reliable sources to inform you about the forces at work, determine how best to approach the sources, and finally organize the information you have obtained. It is possible that positive and negative forces such as the following are at work here: personal or public transportation, marketable skills, policies on the employment of women, current job market conditions, family role beliefs and values, family economic status, self concept, previous job history, basic literacy level and ethnic or racial

status.

Process

Adult education program planners are faced with the task of identifying those forces which are impacting needs. Therefore, we suggest that you follow a three step procedure for getting this job done.

First, for each identified need, develop a comprehensive listing of forces which are judged likely to be impacting it. The forces may be positive forces; namely, those that contribute to the reduction of the identified discrepancy or need; those that function as the "good guys"; those which work toward the remediation of the identified need. The forces may also be negative forces; namely, those that impede the reduction of the identified discrepancy; those that function as the "bad guys"; those which work toward the flourishing of the identified need. In developing the list, you may want to start with brainstorming some positive or negative forces that are intrinsic to the persons who own the need. They may be related to the individuals' attitudes and values, their behaviors or actions; or to their possession of specific knowledge or skills. Additionally, you may then wish to move on to those other extrinsic factors that may account for the need state. Some of these relate to personal resources, others to the physical environment, social environment, community institutions, whether public or private and the domain of social norms and prevailing values. These

intrinsic and extrinsic forces would provide valuable clues in explaining given need states.

To better illustrate the situation, let us give you one example. Let us say that you are the Civilian Personnel Officer of Jefferson Air Force Base and you are presented with an identified need for developing a management intern training program for the civilian employees. You may find that some of the positive forces impacting the need are: the management's desire to retain highly qualified currently employed personnel, the projected high retirement rate in middle and top level management positions, the legal support for upward mobility programs of this type from the Equal Employment Opportunity Program, the Federal Women's Program, support from the Government Employees Labor Union; and good feedback from previous programs of a similar nature nationwide in the other branches of the military. At the same time, you may be able to identify some negative forces impacting the need, such as: the unstable employment practices due to frequent agency manpower reductions, the application of veterans' preference hiring practices which tend to exclude a large percentage of the population from employment opportunity; the quota setting by such programs as Equal Employment Opportunity, Federal Women's Programs and Labor Unions which tend either to obstruct or retard the employee selection process; some locally established personnel criteria which tend to restrict movement between career fields; and the

increased difficulty in adequately projecting retirement rates under the impact of an accelerating economy.

Our second step is to analyze the relative strength or magnitude of each force, positive or negative, in causing the need situation. In the above example, you would probably find that management's desire to attract and retain highly qualified civilian personnel and the anticipated high retirement rate are very strong positive forces, while good feedback from previous programs is a moderately strong positive force. You might also think frequent manpower reduction is a strong negative force upon the identified need.

Third, you have to decide what forces should be included at this time for verification by appropriate sources. Would you like to include only those moderate to very strong negative forces and only the moderate to very strong positive forces, or would you rather specify the inclusion of all forces except those negative ones that are too weak to have import on the need state. It is important to note here that forces of moderate to great strength in impacting needs can later be advantageously manipulated in the remediation of needs. One could accentuate, enlist or capitalize on the positive forces; while at the same time, one could inactivate, reduce, or eliminate the negative forces at work.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to identify a broad array of positive and negative forces of significant strength in impacting needs.

Determining Sources of Force Information

In this section, we are not going to introduce you to any new concepts on sources. No new definitions are necessary. Rather, we are going to review with you the three main sources of information as we have presented them in the chapter, Determining Where Information Can Be Found, and also review with you some basic criteria that you may use in the final selection of sources.

A source is an individual, group of individuals, or a piece of recorded material that can provide you with valid and reliable data relative to the forces impacting the need. The sources we suggest here for soliciting force information are similar to the sources that you can approach in getting your need information. They are the authorities, your target population, and some relevant recorded materials.

First, we suggest that you develop a list of individuals representing your target population to allow for their input into the identification of those forces impacting the needs attributed to them. Second, we propose, as before, that you develop a list of institutions and independent individuals who have special knowledge and experience about the forces to be explored in the study. Then, choose a workable number of these institutions or independent individual authorities that you would actually approach because they contribute significantly or uniquely to the realization of the goals identified in your study and therefore should be knowledgeable

about forces at work. Third, we recommend that you develop a list of possible recorded materials that may give you data relating to the forces causing need. Here, again, we advise you to assess the recorded materials according to its geographical, legal, political, ethical and temporal accessibility. You will want to tap only those documents that are accessible to your study. Fourth, we advise you to analyze each source of information in terms of its contribution to the validity and reliability of the need data. Fifth, you should decide on the relevant sources from which the force information will be retrieved.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to identify appropriate sources to obtain information on what forces are at work for any given need.

Determining Strategies for Gathering Force Information

In the following paragraphs, as in the previous ones, we will not introduce any new concepts or new steps for you to undertake. We would like only to refresh your memory on the definitions of, and procedures for, retrieval strategies from either your target population, authorities or recorded materials. This time, they are identified as strategies for gathering force information.

As mentioned before, retrieval strategies for key informants are defined as methods for collecting or obtaining force data from either the authorities or the target population. You should develop a list of retrieval strategies that help

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you to solicit force information from your target population. You may have to develop another list of retrieval strategies that suit the authorities. It is of critical importance that you analyze each strategy in terms of its feasibility as well as its contribution to obtaining valid and reliable force data. Retrieval strategies for recorded materials are ways of extracting relevant force data from available printed information. You should analyze each of the recorded materials in terms of its compatibility to the purpose, definitions of goal concept, geographical coverage, population, time frame, and methodology of your needs assessment. The closer the sources correspond to the six criteria, the more likely you will decide to make use of these readily available materials. However, it should not come as a surprise that you may need to make certain adjustments in some parts because of identified differences.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to identify appropriate strategies for gathering information on the forces impacting needs.

Determining Methods for Summarizing Force Information

In our previous chapter, Determining How to Summarize Information, we asked you to reflect upon the three methods we proposed for summarizing your need information. They are filtration, combination and organization. The same three processes or approaches can be repeated to summarize your force information. Here again, we will be reviewing concepts

and processes rather than introducing new ones.

Filtration is the process of selectively screening out certain force data on the basis of clearly identified criteria. We suggest that you review your force data, analyze them in terms of the magnitude of their impact upon the identified need, and decide on deleting those forces that either show an absence of, or a very weak, impact upon the need. You should also filter out data that indicate a probable or evolutionary dissolution of the force in the near future and those data relating to a force which bears little or no instrumental relationship to other forces and which could ultimately be altered indirectly through plans of action directed toward other forces. Combination of force data is the process of translating force data from one form to another to reduce information overload. It also works to facilitate the analysis, storage and reporting of raw data. We propose that you review your filtered force data, analyze them in terms of possible categorization and finally decide on groupings of major force types such as economic or social forces. Organization is the process of arranging the composite data base that survived the filtering process and subsequently was combined in various ways from the raw data form. The composite force data can be organized in terms of goals, in terms of subgroups of the target population and in terms of the forces. Such an organization of force data will give you and your institution

a comprehensive view of the diversified forces impacting needs. It provides a blueprint for the development of congruent, collaborative, integrated and selective programming to remediate the identified needs.

Thus, the Principle for Practice is to identify appropriate methods for summarizing force information.

Summary

We have presented in the four previous chapters, the four major issues related to the collection of need information--determining what information to collect, where information can be found, how to gather information and how to summarize information. In this chapter, we have tried to help you to interpret the need information collected by identifying positive or negative forces impacting the needs.

We have also led you through the same processes for determining what force information to collect, where that information is to be found, how that information is to be obtained and how that information is to be summarized.

Forces are any physical, social or psychological entities which contribute either to the deterioration or to the improvement of an identified discrepancy in human striving or need. They affect an identified need either positively or negatively with varying degrees of intensity. It is important for needs assessors to identify a broad array of positive and negative forces of significant strength that impact any given need.

The three major sources of force information are identical to the sources of need information. They are the authorities, the target population and the available recorded materials. To seek valid and reliable force information, we must strive to solicit input from authorities that contribute significantly or uniquely to the realization of goals, a representative sample of the actual owners of needs, and recorded material that is judged geographically, legally, politically, ethically and temporally accessible.

Appropriate strategies for gathering force information refer to both good retrieval strategies for getting force data from your key informants and proper retrieval strategies to extract force data from available recorded materials. Retrieval strategies for authorities and target population are to be assessed in terms of their feasibility and capability of yielding comprehensive, reliable and valid data. At the same time, appropriate retrieval strategies for recorded material would lead you to available recorded material which is either identical to, or compatible with, the purpose, definitions of goals, geographical area, population, time frame and methodology of your needs assessment.

Once force information is collected, we suggest that you undergo the same processes of summarization as you did for your needs information. We propose that you filter out force data that have little or no impact on the identified needs; delete those forces that might eventually be dissolved

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and ultimately be altered through action directed toward other instrumental forces; and combine your screened data, either according to some force types, or according to the relationship between the forces and the needs. Finally, to better facilitate the presentation of force data, it is recommended that you organize the composite data in terms of goals, subgroups of your target population, and the forces you identify as significant in impacting the need.

In this chapter, you have been provided with a process for determining forces that impinge upon real needs. This chapter constitutes the last portion of our needs assessment process.

It is anticipated that through a review of some of the central considerations of the needs assessment process, you have been sufficiently prepared to begin to build programs to remediate the needs which you have both identified and diagnosed. It is anticipated that you have been fortified with a solid foundation from which program designs can flow. It is acknowledged that, although such a base is no guarantee of future quality programming, it is the most defensible posture from which to engage in building educational and service programs for adults. It sets the stage for your significant contribution to the improvement of the quality of life for our adult population.

Lastly, it is recommended that you read the concluding chapter for a capsule review of the entire needs assessment

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process and a preview of how it can help an adult education programmer in building effective educational activities.

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CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION TO THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In the previous chapters, you have been at the heart of the phenomenal needs assessment world. You have focused on the paramount issues of determining what information to collect, where information is to be found, how to gather the information, how to summarize it and, lastly, how to interpret the information. You have been introduced to the essential components, twelve concepts, which in consort shape, define and comprise that heart. You have been introduced to the critical operations, sixteen principles for practice, which in total describe the delicate, interdependent and complex functions of this heart.

One may then ask, has all that can be said about needs assessment been said? We must respond to that in the negative. However, what has been said is of the essence and once these concepts and principles have been seriously addressed, the myriad of other associated issues which will arise to be addressed in implementing a needs assessment will then fall into place; for example, will efforts be made to keep the organizational hierarchy informed as we proceed through the needs assessment; will we recruit volunteers to assist in the data collection process; how will we inform the diverse

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publics interested in the results of the study; who will comprise the needs assessment planning task force; and to what extent are we going to be able to encourage volunteers to assist in the entire process?

In fact, we have left you at the center of the decision making process. We hope we have provided some critical information and highlighted some basic alternatives for you. With these two sources for your decisions we encouraged you to inject your values as you moved from one decision point to the next decision point in planning for your needs assessment.

This needs assessment handbook is viewed as an "educational" resource in the radical sense of the word. It is seen as a respecter of who you are and where you are personally, and professionally it places you, the decision maker, at the center of the process. It builds upon the foundation of your experience and intuition, offers you new concepts and principles to perform in your practice, and leaves you to decide the if, the how and the when of their employment.

One wager which we feel confident in making is that should you decide to make these concepts and principles "live" and "work" for you in a needs assessment undertaking, you have the potential for creating an educational program that is innovative, responsive, accountable, targeted, collaborative and powerful; you have the potential to create a very

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different type of program than you would have created had you not undertaken the needs assessment.

With the information capable of being gleaned from serious application of these concepts and principles, you should be in a position to make major program development decisions. To highlight just a few:

The identification of needs for various subpopulations within your study will enable you to target such factors as promotion, scheduling and financing your programs.

The identification of discrepancies in how authorities and target groups perceive the same situation will enable you to consider a backing off of a specific program for the target group and a planning of some face-to-face sessions with the two groups to help identify the bases for the discrepancies.

The securing of information from the intended program participants may enable you to recruit them, or a portion of their membership, into the program planning committee so that they can have a role to play in helping build programs responsive to their needs.

The enlistment of key authorities should enable you to receive wider leadership support from major sectors of your community and possibly pave the way for co-sponsorship of appropriate programs with some of these groups.

Building a scope of study out of what constitutes your professional world--mission, current and long-range concerns--

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will result in data collected that can be used and that is not superfluous.

The interpretation of identified needs should provide you with critical leverage points and enable you to work with a broader array of colleagues in addressing--overcoming or enhancing--those factors which tend to account for the persistence of the identified need.

And lastly, the formal assessment or verification of need places you as a planner in an ideal position to tap additional sources of funding in the private and/or public sector in an effort to work alone or in consort to generate programs responsive to these needs.

We wish you well as you embark upon the challenging, rewarding and awesome world of discovering where people are, where the levels of aspiration of and/or the levels of expectation for these people are. This journey will ready you for the sensitive perception of needs and the dynamic and energetic response to them. In sum, needs assessment is one of the keys to open the door for an improvement in that elusive individual and collective "quality of life" toward which we all aspire.